

Teaching Strategy: Big Paper

Today we're doing the silent Big Paper. We have five stations, a big paper on each. And so the students are going to be going through with each of those stations marking up the papers, annotating the readings as much as they want as well as commenting, and having conversations, checking off, or contradicting, challenging, supporting other students' claims as we go through all five stations. At the end of the station, they will end up picking highlights from everything that has gone around annotations and showing that to the class as a whole.

And we have the students use that as a drawing board. And that really, I think, brings out student comments and creativity in a way that if we're just sitting and we go over it in class doesn't necessarily engage a lot of students because some of them won't want to raise their hands. Some of them won't want to talk.

But in that sort of private sphere of looking over that paper while it is attached to the poster and being in stations, reading it, and then being able to sort of write on it, it also gives them a connection to the history itself. They are dealing with primary sources, but it almost feels personal in a way.

What we're going to do is we're going to split up, and we've done Big Paper before. Big Paper are these stations. We've done this activity. I'm going to split you up into groups, or you're going to split yourselves up into groups based off numbering.

This time around, what I would like you to do is we're adding steps to it. Last time we went around to each station, and you annotated the reading itself. And then you left comments. You tagged onto other people's comments.

So this time, what I would like for you all to do is stay silent the entire time. In doing that, I'm hoping that it's going to force you all-- this is the reasoning behind you all being silent, I'm not just asking you to be silent because I'm mean-spirited. I'm hoping that you all will-- any sort of comment, any sort of thought that you all get, will write it on there instead of saying it out loud.

There are three guiding questions that I want you all to think about as you're going through all of this. How do the sources show the resiliency of newly freed enslaved peoples? What are the perspectives of the newly acquired freedom of former enslaved peoples that these sources give us? And what do people need in order to sustain and protect their freedom?

It will be up here if you need it. We'll go over it again. Think about these quickly before we start. Have them in mind and then we'll talk again. You'll have some time to re-collect your thoughts.

I'll give you five minutes on the first one. I'll tell you to shuffle. Remember that I asked you to add this new rule of staying quiet, right, Leo? Five minutes.

I do like how I'm seeing people already having that silent conversation on the paper.

So we're going to start off with our first station.

So our document was called the Freedmen's Bureau Outlines the Duties of Freed People. And it really just outlines how to be a successful free citizen in America. It talks about how you should-- seek education and how you should just because you're free doesn't mean you shouldn't work. You should work really hard.

It also talks about, which I thought was interesting, in the way that you have to prove that you deserve your freedom, have good behavior and then maybe other white people in the South will recognize, oh, they can handle freedom, and they deserve to be free people.

Yeah, it's almost kind of tragic in a sense. They're saying we have to act-- we have to be better, twice as good if we're going to be treated the same. Any of the comments that stick out?

Yeah. We said one of the most shocking things we saw was in the first sentence. It said you have been declared forever free. But just like someone commented, that there was still the Black Codes, the Jim Crow laws, and systematic racism throughout the history of the U.S.

Oh, man.

So, I have to say, maybe it didn't stand up to time.

Yeah, absolutely. We know from hindsight, you can imagine these people have such excitement about this. And important-wise? You've already summed up everything but if--

We saw the quote that says no people can be truly great or free without education, which is kind of surprising but also makes sense because you can't really get

anywhere in this country without an education. You need an education to get a good job and make money.

As well as run a democracy. Everyone needs to participate in a democracy. It's run by the people. That's the whole point. And in order to do that, we need an education.

The process with Big Paper today in class I think worked really well with the kids. We added that extra layer of basically the silent conversation, which we're adding more and more rules as we go in. It worked really well in order to get them acquainted with the sources themselves and reacquainted with the idea that the people that we're talking about have voices.

And I think they could really wrestle with it because you have the actual source in the middle of this huge paper, and I'm telling them, it's yours. There's a little bit of the personalness that you get with a journal on these big papers where they can mark it up, they can annotate it on their own, as well as write all over it, which I think gives people ownership, and it worked really well.